

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

STATEMENT ON AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL

SCLEROSIS (ALS) (from www.va.gov) Last September the Secretary of Veterans Affairs made amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuous active service in the military. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can now pay disability compensation to veterans with ALS. Their survivors are also eligible for VA benefits.

In an effort to provide veterans this new and much-needed support, VA sent notification letters to veterans with ALS advising them of their potential eligibility for disability compensation benefits. On August 13, 2009, VA sent outreach letters to 1,864 veterans and survivors across the country. Unfortunately, VA made a coding error and a number of veterans who should not have received this letter did. The Department is reviewing individual claims files for all the recipients of this letter to identify those who received it by mistake.

VA employees are calling veterans and survivors to ensure that they understand the purpose of the letter, explain why they mistakenly received the letter, and express VA's sincere apologies for the distress caused by this unfortunate and regrettable error.

Questions and Answers:

How many veterans have been affected? Approximately one third of the letters VA sent were miscoded.

Will VA be issuing a formal apology? Yes, VA is calling all affected veterans and will also be issuing them a formal letter of apology.

Why did veterans who do not have ALS get letters? VA used data and information from its data base to identify veterans diagnosed with ALS or who had filed a claim for ALS, but were not currently receiving disability compensation benefits for the condition. As a result of problems in the codes VA used to identify these veterans, VA sent the letter to some veterans who do not have ALS.

What is VA doing to correct the mistake? VA is working to identify the specific problems that caused the misidentification of veterans records. VA will ensure any future data extracts for similar outreach purposes are properly formulated and independently validated to prevent these types of problems in the future.

Will veterans be reimbursed for medical expenses incurred? VA will reimburse veterans who incurred expenses for medical evaluations conducted as a result of receiving an erroneous notification.

What will VA do to prevent this from happening again? As a result of this incident, VA is creating a more rigorous process that includes thorough and careful screening of the data, comprehensive review and approval process that will include involvement from our stakeholders before release of notifications letters.

MY HealtheVet – VA'S ONLINE PERSONAL HEALTH RECORD (VA Fact Sheet) VA's online personal health record, My HealtheVet, located at www.myhealth.va.gov, provides America's veterans access to personal, secure, informed health information. Through a Web-based portal, registered veterans have Internet access at any time to VA health information that allows them to become informed partners in their care with their medical providers.

Any Internet user may record and store important health and military history information and access personal medical information by registering at the Web site. Visitors to the site can keep activity and food journals; record, track and graph their vital signs; record and store their health history and prescriptions; access trusted health information; and read about VA benefits and services.

Veterans enrolled for care at a VA facility can use enhanced functions online after they make a visit to a VA medical center to verify their identity. These registrants can request VA prescription refills online and receive personalized reminders and tips on how to stay well. The refills are delivered to veterans' homes in five to 10 business days.

In the near future, veterans will be able to schedule and change appointments, view their laboratory results, enter and update their own health information for their medical providers to monitor, and communicate with their VA medical care team through secure messaging.

In addition to My HealtheVet linking to two trusted medical libraries, MedlinePlus® and HealthWise®, in 2009 clusters of health topics and advice were created to guide viewers easily to categories of useful information. Under "Research Health," readers find information for avoiding illness (Healthy Living Centers); facts about common conditions (Diseases & Conditions Centers); and screening for various kinds of mental illness.

EXPANSION OF COUNSELING FOR COMBAT VETERANS ANNOUNCED (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that combat veterans will receive readjustment counseling and other assistance in 28 additional communities across the country where Vet Centers will be established in 2010. The community-based Vet Centers -- already in all 50 states -- are a key component of VA's mental health program, providing veterans with mental health screening and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) counseling.

The existing 232 centers conduct community outreach to offer counseling on employment, family issues and education to combat veterans and family members, as well as bereavement counseling for families of servicemembers killed on active duty and counseling for veterans who were sexually harassed on active duty.

Vet Center services are earned through service in a combat zone or area of hostility and are provided at no cost to veterans or their families. They are staffed by small multi-disciplinary teams, which may include social workers, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, master's-level counselors and outreach specialists. Over 70 percent of Vet Center employees are veterans themselves, a majority of whom served in combat zones.

Florida communities receiving new VA Vet Centers are Bay, Collier, Lake, Marion, and Okaloosa Counties.

THE NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY (NRD) at <https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.org/> is an online resource for wounded, ill and injured Service Members, veterans, their families and those who support them. The NRD provides information on, and access to, medical and non-medical services and resources across the country which will help them reach their personal and professional goals as they successfully transition from recovery to community living. The NRD is an online partnership of the Department of Defense, Department of Labor and Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as numerous veteran service and benefit organizations; non-profit community-based and faith-based organizations; academic institutions, professional associations and philanthropic organizations.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):

www.ocwen.com

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov